

**Statement of Dr. Mike D. McDaniel
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality**

**Before the
House Committee on Homeland Security
Hearing Entitled
“Protecting the Protectors: 1st Responder Health Issues
In the Wake of Catastrophic Events”**

**Thursday, September 20, 2007
Room 311
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC**

Mister Chairman, Members:

I am Mike McDaniel, Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

My testimony today will be short and necessarily condensed. However, I have provided the committee with more detailed written testimony.

Supporting exhibits referenced in my oral and written testimony can be found on LDEQ's website at www.deq.louisiana.gov. The exhibits contain more specific information that will be helpful to those interested in learning more about LDEQ's activities in the early stages of our response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

LDEQ's responsibilities under Louisiana's Emergency Operations Plan are limited primarily to Environmental Support Function 10 – Oil Spill, Hazardous Materials and Radiation. However, as detailed in my written testimony, the Department conducted many activities that yielded critical information to assist and protect first responders. This information was provided through the Unified Command Center. These activities included:

- **Search and rescue**
- **Reconnaissance, damage and environmental threats assessment**
- **Environmental sampling and assessment, and**
- **Hazardous and radioactive materials management**

Search and rescue - Teaming with the Louisiana Sheriff's Association, LDEQ employees aided in the rescue of approximately 480 people from the area impacted by Hurricane Katrina

Reconnaissance, damage and environmental threats

Assessment – Our immediate concerns relevant to responders included industrial sites, oil spills, wastewater treatment plants, rail cars, barges, radioactive materials locations, drinking water sources and intakes, underground storage tanks, ruptured pipelines, superfund sites, access routes, and photo documentation. Aerial reconnaissance was used to provide an initial evaluation of the status of industrial sites, water and wastewater treatment plants, rail cars, ships, barges, radioactive material locations, National Priority List (Superfund), and known hazardous materials sites. In addition to high resolution aerial photography and satellite imagery, also utilized were the EPA ASPECT aircraft, the Department of Energy's airborne radiation detectors, EPA's mobile air monitoring units, and a helicopter mounted HAWK camera. The EPA ASPECT aircraft has capabilities for air quality and radiation monitoring as well as aerial photography. The HAWK camera is an infrared gas imaging technology that captures images of volatile gases that are invisible to the naked eye. The information obtained during these assessments was shared with the Unified Command Center for multiple purposes including assisting first responders. In addition, hazards such as oil spills and gas releases were photo documented and potential access routes were evaluated to assist first responders and for follow-up ground assessments.

As facilities and sites became accessible, ground assessments were made of all potential sources and known releases of hazardous materials. Drinking water sources were evaluated for contamination and the operational status of water and wastewater treatment plants were determined. In many cases multiple visits to sites were made in order to ascertain that potential hazards had been secured. For example, 383 visits were made to 258 radiation source licensees in order to verify that all of the radiation sources had been secured.

Environmental Sampling and Assessment

With EPA and other partners, thousands of environmental samples were collected including floodwaters; the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, adjacent coastal areas, and the Mississippi River; sediment and soils; seafood; and air quality. These efforts are detailed in our written testimony. In all, over a million individual analyses were performed and data and health risk assessments presented to the public on EPA and LDEQ websites, through presentations, press releases, press conferences, media interviews and calls to live radio.

Effectively communicating the environmental sampling results to first responders and the public was recognized as critical, and great effort was expended in this area. The various means of communicating environmental sampling results to first responders and the public along with some examples are described in our written testimony.

Hazardous and Radioactive Materials Management

With valuable assistance and resources provided by EPA, over 22.4 million of pounds of hazardous materials were collected and removed from waste streams for proper treatment and disposal. Over a million

white goods such as refrigerators, 956,000 electronic goods, and 250,000 small engines were collected and sent to be recycled. Over 4 million orphan containers – many containing hazardous materials- were collected and processed for recycling or disposal. Over 110 school laboratories were cleared of hazardous materials.

Our radiological response efforts included issues related to security of the state's nuclear energy facilities and radioactive materials held by our licensees.

Protecting Our First Responders

Throughout our emergency response efforts, great care was taken to protect all first responders working from our Unified Command Center. The LDEQ attended many briefings on a daily basis to share information from its assessments and other activities that was used to assist and protect first responders. Specifically, environmental conditions as well as health and safety procedures were discussed in briefings held every morning before our field crews left for their various responsibilities. Examples of the types of communications and information provided to the responders are provided in our written testimony.

In closing, I would like to note that, at the request of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, LDEQ put together a report entitled, "Some Observations and Recommendations for Those Planning for and Responding to Environmental Challenges Presented by Major Disasters". This report addresses issues relevant to this hearing and can be found on LDEQ's website.

That concludes my statement and I'd now be happy to take any questions you might have.